

Jacksonian Democracy: (White) Americans Learn to Play Politics



Was the United States in 1850 a democracy?

- Why might some people say it was not?

The Triumph of “Democracy”

- During the Revolutionary period, voting rights generally expanded, but property requirements remained.
- During the 1800s, property requirements disappeared.
- Why?
 - Men without property had continued to demand the right to vote ever since the Revolution.
 - In the North, increasing number of men could not acquire property and most were uncomfortable with fewer citizens voting.
 - In the West, a sort of rough equality dominated society.

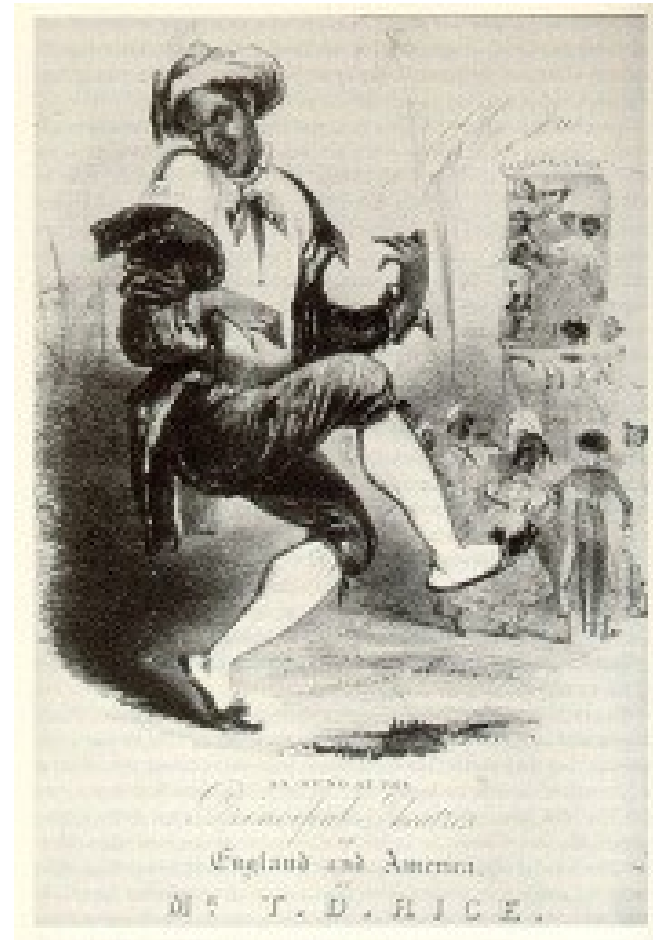
A Democratic Culture

- As almost all white men became involved in voting, American political culture changed.
 - The vote became equated with citizenship and equality.
 - Men had a duty to be active in the public sphere.
 - Masculine equality became a key element of American culture.
- How might American society come to view those without the vote?



The Limits of Democracy

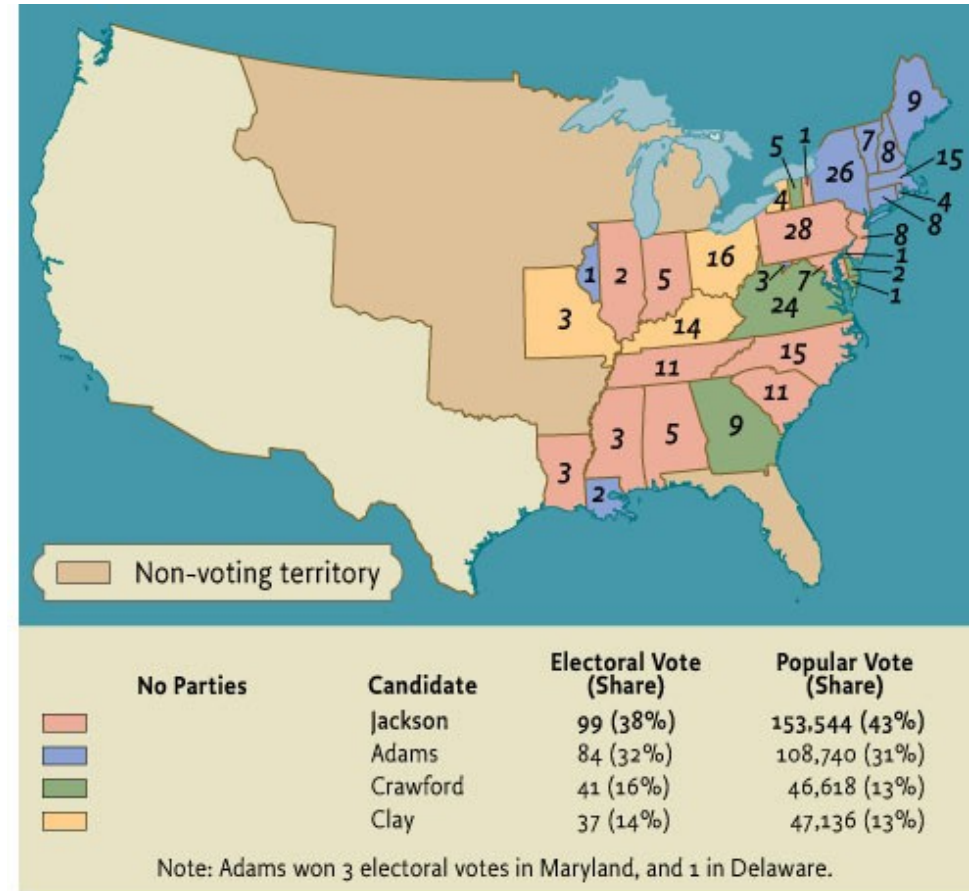
- How had property requirements been justified?
- Now that almost all white men could vote, economic dependence could not legitimate exclusions.
 - How could you legitimate excluding people?
 - By the claim that non-voters were naturally inferior.
 - Women were inferior to men.
 - Blacks were inferior to whites.
- To be a white man was to be a citizen.
To be black man (or woman) was to be a non-entity with few if any rights.



A minstrel show performer

The Rise of the Second Party System

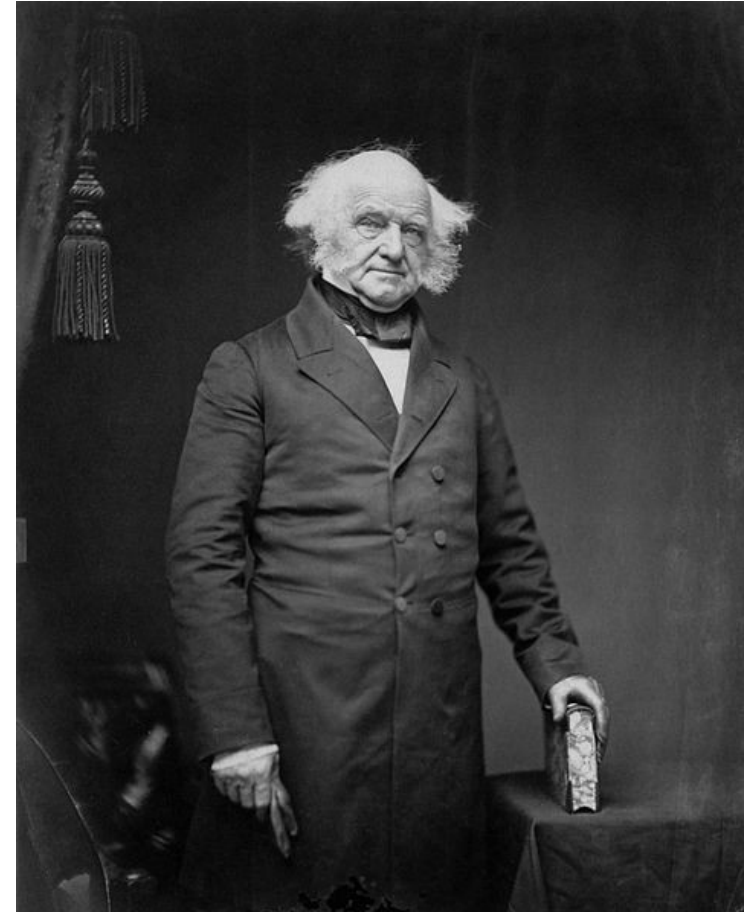
- After the War of 1812, the Federalist Party had ceased to exist.
 - For over a decade the US had no party competition.
- Election of 1824
 - America had a contested election but without parties.
 - Jackson won a plurality of both the electoral votes (38%) and the popular vote (43%).
 - What happens in this situation?
 - The House chose Adams.



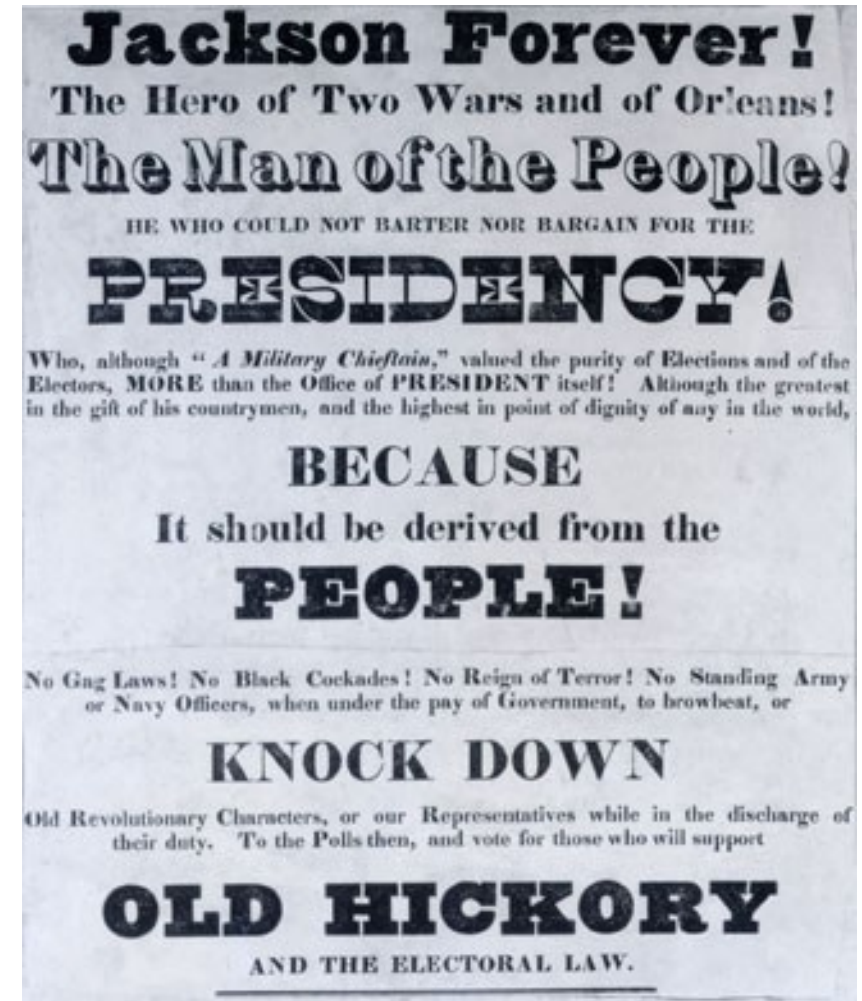
The Election Results of 1824

The Little Magician: Martin Van Buren

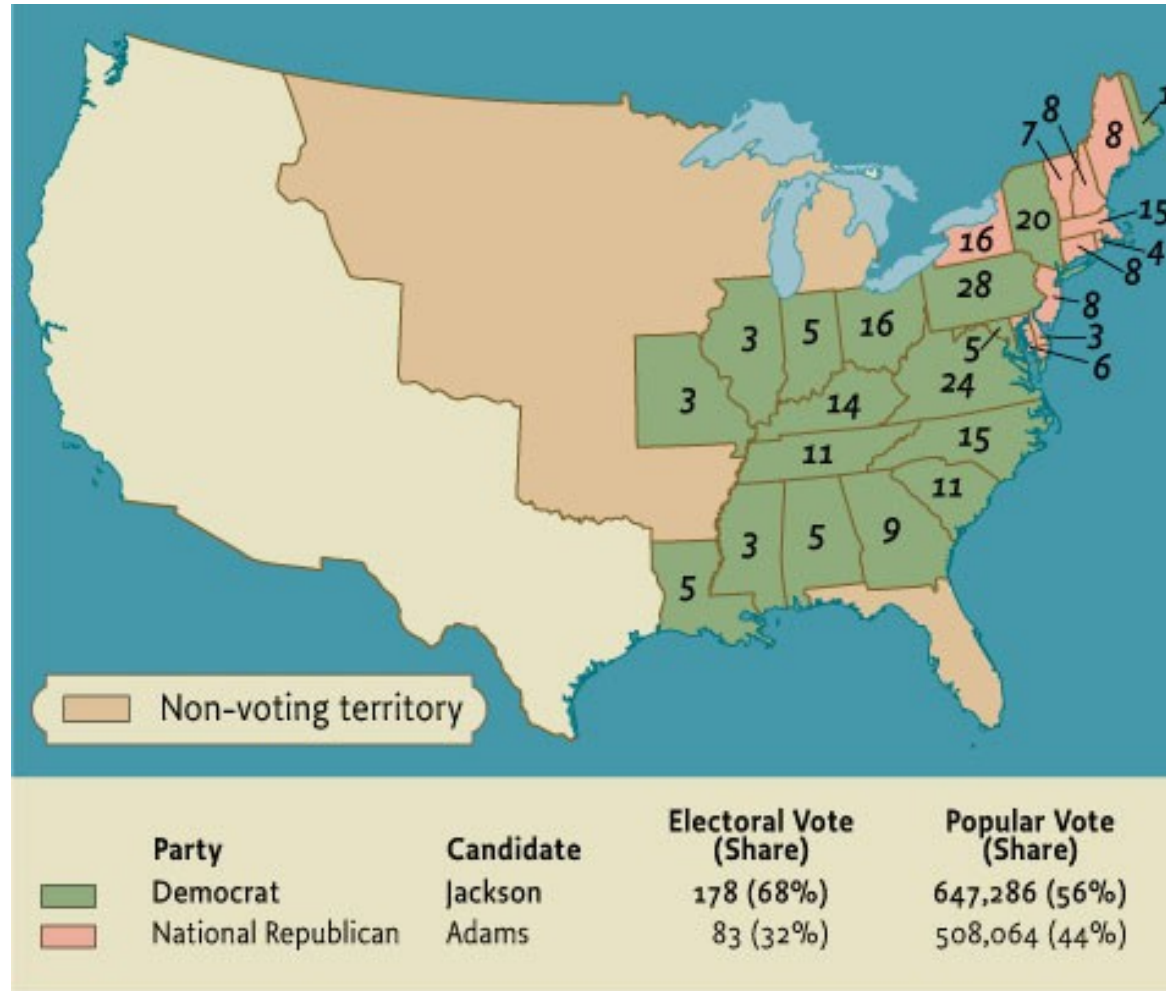
- The man behind Jackson and the Democratic Party.
- Typified the new politics
 - The son of a tavern keeper with little formal education.
 - Before politicians came from elite backgrounds.
 - Rose to prominence through politics.
 - Before one went into politics because one was prominent.
- Integral to the creation of the Democratic Party.
- Argued that parties were necessary in a democracy and even good.



The Election of 1828



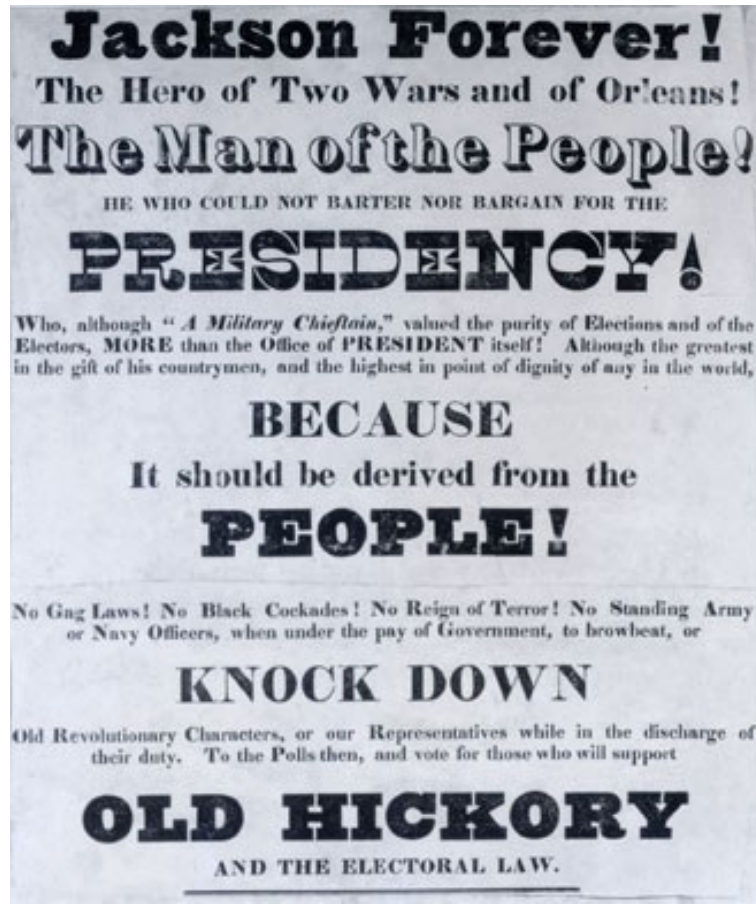
The Election of 1828



The Second Party System

- Jackson's followers became the Democratic Party (the oldest organized political party in the world).
- Those who opposed Jackson and his policies became the Whig Party.
- Initially, party differences revolved around Jackson himself.
- However, the parties did have very different policy positions and interpretations of the role of the federal government.

The Second Party System



The Democratic view of Jackson



The Whig view of Jackson

The Parties

- The Democratic Party

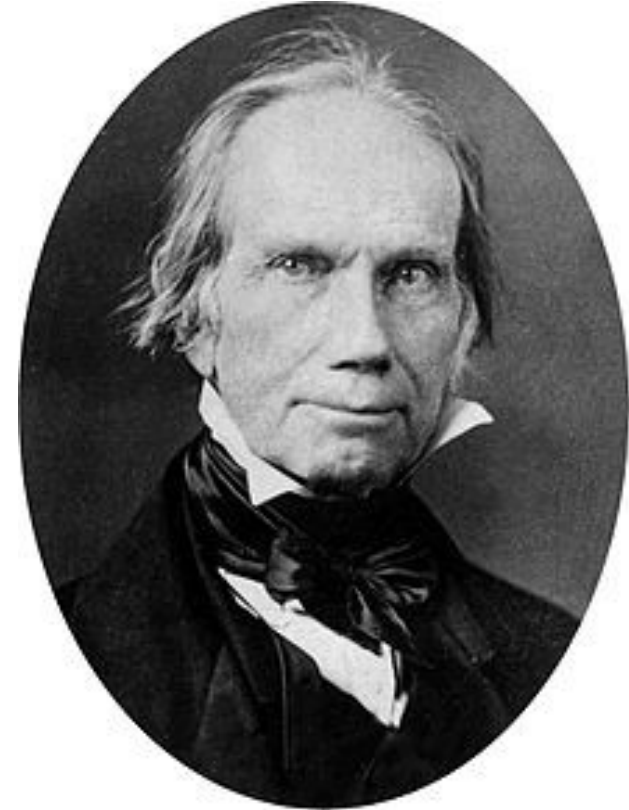
- Alarmed by the rise in economic inequality caused by economic development.
- Argued that the federal government should remain aloof from the economy.
- Committed to a weak federal government as the best protection of liberty and unity.
- Believed individual morality was a private or local communal matter.

- The Whig Party

- Believed that economic development was good for all Americans.
- Argued the federal government should act to assist the economy.
- Believed a “strong” federal government would unite the nation and protect liberties.
- Believed government should reform America to create a moral and responsible population.

Henry Clay's American System

- The Whig Party united behind an economic program called the “American System.”
 - This idea was first suggested by James Madison in 1815.
- It became associated with Kentuckian Henry Clay during the mid-1800s.
- It called for extensive intervention by the federal government into the national economy.
 - A new national bank
 - A high tariff to protect American industry
 - Federal financing of “internal improvements”
- Connected to other plans for federal action.
- How would a Democrat react to this program?



Who supported each party?

- The Democratic Party was
 - Strong in the South and West.

- Supported by
 - Entrepreneurs
 - Farmers and urban laborers suspicious of economic change
 - Farmers in regions isolated from the market
 - Many (perhaps most) slaveholders

- The Whig Party was
 - Strong in the Northeast.

- Supported by
 - Established businessmen and bankers
 - Farmers with access to markets
 - The largest southern slaveholders

Organized Parties in Action

- Party machines existed in every part of the country.
 - They got out the vote.
 - They provided benefits to party members.
 - They committed voter fraud.
- Local, state, and national party conventions were held.
 - They nominated candidates.
 - They laid out the party's policies (the "platform").
- The newspaper industry revolved around support for one party or the other.
- Government offices became means to reward supporters.
 - One of the main jobs of a president or governor was to dole out the "spoils."



Campaign banner for William Harrison, 1840

Politics in American Life

- Politics became a major part of American life
 - Elections for some sort of office were constant.
 - Elections involved parades and rallies where food and alcohol was usually served.
 - Politicians became popular heroes with mass followings and nicknames.
 - Lengthy political speeches became a form of entertainment.
 - Election day was often like a public holiday.

